

Message Text

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E.O. 11652: GDS

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SUBJECT: FEDECO ANNOUNCED NATIONAL ELECTORATE FIGURES

REF: (A) LAGOS 2618, (B) LAGOS 1952

1. THE FEDERAL ELECTORAL COMMISSION (FEDECO) HAS ANNOUNCED THAT 47,710,680 PEOPLE WERE REGISTERED TO VOTE DURING THE REGISTRATION CAMPAIGN WHICH ENDED ON FEBRUARY 28. DESPITE WIDELY PUBLICIZED FAILURE OF MANY POTENTIAL VOTERS TO REGISTER, THIS TOTAL IS 20 PERCENT GREATER THAN THE PROJECTED FIGURE OF 39,914,514 WHICH WAS BASED UPON AN INTERPELATION FROM THE 1963 CENSUS.

2. CONTRARY TO EARLIER EXPECTATIONS (REF B), MORE WOMEN WERE REGISTERED THAN MEN. FEDECO REPORTS 24,465,683 WOMEN (51.3 PERCENT) AND 23,244,997 MEN (48.7 PERCENT) ARE ON THE ROLLS.

3. COMMENT: FEDECO MAY HAVE A POLITICAL BOMB ON ITS HANDS. ITS ANNOUNCEMENT RAISES TWO PROBLEMS, THE UNEXPECTED SIZE OF THE CONFIDENTIAL

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ELECTORATE AND INDIVIDUAL STATE TOTALS.

4. WE ASSUME THAT THE OVERALL FIGURE IS REASONABLY CORRECT. THE UNEXPECTED SIZE COULD BE BASED ON A NUMBER OF FACTORS. IT IS PROBABLE THAT NIGERIA'S POPULATION IS SIMPLY CONSIDERABLY GREATER THAN ANYONE HAD IMAGINED. THE ELECTORATE PROJECTION WAS BASED ON THE 1963 CENSUS WHICH MANY EXPERTS CONSIDER TO HAVE BEEN AN UNDER-

COUNT. IT NOW APPEARS THAT NIGERIA'S POPULATION MAY BE WELL IN EXCESS OF 80 MILLION.

5. THE PROBLEM OF STATE TOTALS IS MORE COMPLEX. ACCORDING TO THE PRESS, IT WAS DECIDED AT THE MEETING OF FEDECO STATE COMMISSIONERS IN KADUNA ON FEBRUARY 16 NOT TO RELEASE STATE TOTALS SINCE THERE WILL BE FURTHER REVISION OF FIGURES BEFORE THE FINAL REGISTER IS ISSUED. BUT THE POLITICAL SENSITIVITY OF THE SITUATION WAS REFLECTED IN LAGOS STATE ELECTORAL COMMISSION ALADE ODUNEWU'S MARCH 3 STATEMENT CALLING UPON REPORTERS TO STOP "PESTERING" FEDECO OFFICIALS FOR STATE TOTALS. ODUNEWU ADDED, "WE DON'T WANT TO TURN THIS IMPORTANT EXERCISE INTO A GOVERNMENT CENSUS FOOTBALL." ODUNEWU LATER ADDED THAT THE PREMATURE RELEASE OF STATE FIGURES WOULD DEGENERATE INTO "AN INTERSTATE FIGURES DISPLAY COMPETITION."

6. FEDECO IS THUS FACED WITH A DILEMMA. IF IT DELAYS ANNOUNCING STATE FIGURES, FEDECO RUNS THE RISK OF UNDERMINING ITS ALREADY LIMITED PUBLIC CREDIBILITY AND REVIVING MEMORIES OF THE 1973 CENSUS DEBACLE. HOWEVER, IF FEDECO GOES AHEAD AND ANNOUNCES STATE BY STATE FIGURES WHICH DO NOT COME OUT "RIGHT" POLITICALLY, (I.E., CONSISTENT WITH THE RELATIONSHIPS ESTABLISHED IN 1963 CENSUS) THE ENTIRE REGISTRATION EXERCISE COULD BE JEOPARDIZED. WE BELIEVE THE POSSIBILITY THAT SOMETHING DID NOT COME OUT "RIGHT" HAS BEEN INCREASED BY THE UNANTICIPATED SIZE OF THE TOTAL ELECTORATE. IT MAY MEAN THAT A SECTION OF THE COUNTRY HAS BALLOONED IN REGISTERED VOTERS, AND THEREFORE POPULATION, OUT OF PROPORTION TO THE REST OF THE

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COUNTRY. AN OBVIOUS CANDIDATE WOULD BE THE NORTH, WHICH NOT ONLY SUFFERED FROM REPORTED CENSUS UNDERCOUNTS IN THE PAST BUT HAS ALSO HAD MIGRATION FROM THE SAHEL OVER THE PAST TEN YEARS.

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